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ABSTRACT

This report is a survey of attitudes on desegregation conducted by the Southeastern Regional Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education and Welfare in the Spring of 1969. It was undertaken to help civil rights staff better understand the integration process. The staff interviewed 1230 persons involved in school desegregation in 13 school districts which had experienced desegregation for 2 years. Black and white students, teachers, administrators, and parents in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee were interviewed. Interviewees were asked to give their opinions on how things had gone on in the learning process, the teaching experience, extra-curricular school activities and social activities. An overall positive nature of the majority responses is demonstrated. (KG)

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SURVEY OF ATTITUDES IN DESEGREGATED SCHOOL DISTRICTS, SPRING, 1969

Since the landmark decision of the Supreme Court in 1954 this nation has been struggling to free itself from the pattern of discriminatory segregated public education in the South.

No domestic issue has received more public attention. Still, very little attention has been paid to the experiences of the students and teachers involved in the historic transition from segregated to desegregated school systems. And yet the ultimate test of our efforts to achieve equal educational opportunity must be how the children are affected.

What happens inside the schoolroom after desegregation steps are finally taken? How does the learning process operate? How do white and black children relate to each other? What new problems confront the teachers?

In an effort to begin to answer some of these questions, the staff of the Southeastern Regional Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare visited 13 school districts in five Southeastern states to talk with those most directly concerned: students, parents, teachers and school administrators.

The staff of the Office for Civil Rights is normally involved in the compliance program of H.E.W. under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This limited survey, undertaken in the spring of 1969, was planned to obtain information that would help the staff better understand the desegregation process.

The survey was exclusively a study of attitudes. Some 1,230 persons were interviewed. Those interviewed included 115 white and 13 Negro school administrators; 208 white and 128 black teachers; 205 white and 150 black parents of children in desegregated situations; and 222 white and 180 black students, grades 8 through 12. Also included were some interviews with community leaders of both races. For comparative purposes, some interviews were conducted with students and teachers in all-white or all-black schools in the communities visited.

Persons interviewed were asked to give their views on how things had gone in the learning process, the teaching experience, extra-curricular school activities and social activities. Comment on other areas was invited. No record was kept of the names of those interviewed, so that they might feel free to talk candidly. The interviewers were divided fairly evenly between white and black.

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Every effort was made to minimize the opinions of Office for Civil Rights interviewers in this survey. Interviewers were instructed to participate in discussion only to stimulate responses and to record them without interpretation. The interviews were arranged so that white interviewed white and black, and black interviewed white and black about the same number of times.

An effort was made to select districts of differing sizes and percentages of black and white students, in different geographical areas, and with different histories of racial cooperation of tensions. The survey focused primarily on districts experiencing their second year of desegregation so that the views would be based on substantial experience.

The 13 districts covered in the survey were in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee.

The survey has admitted limitations in terms of any regional generalizations. Although one urban district was included, that of Dade County, Florida, most of the districts visited had school populations of from three to six thousand. The survey included districts voluntarily desegregating under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Most of the larger cities of the region are under Federal court order. None of the districts visited had a majority of Negro students. Only three had over 30 percent black students. The survey did not include the areas most resistant to desegregation. Such areas simply did not have enough desegregation to be appropriate for study in this context. The views of those included in this survey may, or may not, have relevance for these most resistant districts.

The survey is intended to reflect the generalizations and majority views held by those interviewed. No effort was made to develop reports on specific districts. Those views generally held are noted here, although they do not necessarily reflect the concensus of those contacted in any particular district.

Most of the schools visited in the 13 districts were formerly all white schools which are now majority white. Five schools were visited which were previously all black or which now have a majority of black students with a large minority of whites. We also talked to some teachers and students at schools with all-black student enrollments but some white teachers.

In Dade County, Florida, there was a substantial Spanish surname group, primarily Cuban and Puerto-Rican by background. In a Mississippi county, a number of Indian and "Creole" children were involved.

The following general concensus views are held by those interviewed. Again, it should be noted that these are opinions.

1. The whole school desegregation process is working much better than was generally anticipated according to roughly 9 out of 10 of those interviewed. The one statement most often repeated was "It's going much better than I expected." This opinion was expressed by black and white, by students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

   Those most concerned about the process are the white parents. A sizeable minority of this group said they felt that academic standards are dropping and that unfortunate social results will follow. White students and teachers only rarely expressed such fears.

2. The desegregation process goes more smoothly as time goes on and things settle down. Most administrators, teachers, and students stated that things were going better during the 1968-69 year than during the preceeding year, or that things have gone better since the first year of desegregation.

   In a few cases, it was noted that incidents between the races occurred each year during the first several months of school and then ceased or decreased.

3. Desegregation works better when students and teachers involved have had prior experience in desegregated situations. Several schools were visited to which the students came from desegregated elementary or middle schools. In such cases those involved felt that there was less tension and fewer racial problems as a result.

4. There is wide agreement that the black students in desegregated schools are getting a better educational opportunity than was available to them in segregated schools, while the progress of the white students has not been affected.

5. Insofar as social and informal personal relations are concerned, desegregation operates much more harmoniously at the elementary grade level. High school teachers and students perceive varying degrees of tension of hostility in their schools.

6. Faculty desegregation is viewed as successful. There was widespread agreement on this point by black and white teachers and students.

7. The primary factors in determining what happens within a desegregated school are the roles of administrators, principals, and teachers. These roles were viewed as more important than the attitudes of the community or the history of the school issue locally.

The opinions of those interviewed concerning the five subject areas surveyed are as follows:

A. The Learning Process*

Seven out of ten Negro students attending desegregated schools felt that they were receiving better schooling than they had received in the segregated schools. A minority characterized their educational experience as "neither better nor worse." Almost no black students felt that their educational opportunity was less in the desegregated schools.

The comparative evaluation of the all-black and the desegregated junior high and/or high schools varied from district to district. In a few districts a majority of the black students said there was little or no difference in terms of academic standards.

A fairly equal number of black students were making grades "about the same" as at the segregated schools or were doing somewhat less well in terms of grades. Only a handful of black students reported that they were making better grades.

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* Although the OCR teams were not seeking factual verification of views expressed by interviewees, authorities of the Rome City, Ga. school system made available some interesting data concerning the learning process there before and since desegregation.

In 1965 there were three high schools in Rome, two white and one black. White 10th grade students were generally achieving at the 11th and 12th grade level in reading, math, English, and mental maturity. The black 10th grade students were achieving at the 7th and 9th grade level in terms of national norms.

In 1968, following several years of desegregation, all 10th grade students were given the California Achievement Test. This time the white students in desegregated schools were achieving at the 11th and 12th grade levels, as before, and the Negro students remaining in the segregated schools were achieving at the 7th and 9th grade levels, as before. However, those Negro students attending the desegregated, formerly white, high schools were achieving at the 9th and 10th grade levels, on the average.

Negro parents were even more pleased than their children about the learning process. One Negro mother said, "I was so pleased to see all those new books."

The white students generally saw no difference in academic standards or in their own learning progress since desegregation. Almost invariably they stated that "Its' just the same," as it was in the white schools before the black students came.

Most of the white and black teachers shared the view that the whites are learning as much, the blacks more since desegregation. Only 20 of the 205 white teachers, on the other hand, felt that there had been some loss of standards and of the rate of progress of their classes.

White parents were the most critical group in terms of the learning process. Although they generally agreed that the standards have not changed since desegregation, a significant minority did feel that the standards have dropped and that their children have been adversely affected.

B. <u>The Teaching Experience</u>

There was more agreement and satisfaction in the area of teacher desegregation than in any other area covered by the survey. The great majority of white and black students felt that the race of the teacher made no difference in the quality of the teaching. Most of the students stated that there were strong and weak teachers of both races.

The students generally believed that the teachers were teaching without racial favor or prejudice. A number cited instances of teachers making special efforts to encourage and help students across racial lines.

A few students felt that occasionally teachers did show some racial preference or that they "leaned over backward" to avoid an appearance of discrimination.

Most of the parents, black and white, were satisfied with the teachers in terms of desegregation. The white parents were usually pleased with particular black teachers teaching their children, even when they expressed doubts about Negro teachers in general. In several cases white parents indicated that they had initially been worried, but that their children had talked them out of taking any action and that "things worked out all right."

There were some situations where individual teachers had become widely popular in schools where the students were predominantly of the other race. In three of the majority-white high schools, one or more of the male Negro teachers were singled out for admiration by white students interviewed.

The teachers themselves were somewhat less sanguine about the desegregation process. A number felt insecure about their ability to properly reach and teach students of the other race. Some of the white teachers noted problems growing out of accent and dialect differences.

Most of the teachers, of both races, noted an academic gap between the white and black students. They generally felt that this did constitute a minor problem, but that both racial groups were within the same range of abilities. Most did not feel that desegregation had affected the learning pace of the class. As noted above, a few white teachers disagreed.

The teachers themselves were most concerned about matters of discipline. A number felt restrained from punishing disciplinary infractions by students of the other racial group. White teachers were sometimes afraid that punishment would be seen as racial bias. Negro teachers feared that punishment of white students would create adverse community reaction. These concerns were minimized where the teachers felt they were receiving firm backing from their principals.

Teachers expressed varying and conflicting views concerning disciplinary problems. Most felt that these problems had increased although to a minor extent. Some of the white teachers said that the black students were unruly, used rougher language, that they seemed unaccustomed to discipline. Some black teachers expressed virtually the same concerns about white students, with the exception of the concern about "rough language."

It was noted in many of the districts visited, by black and white students, teachers, and parents, that the most serious disciplinary problems arose on the school buses, out of the reach of the regular faculty. In several cases there were srious concerns expressed about incidents on the buses.

In the majority white schools the teachers noted that the black students tended to participate a bit less in class discussions and activities, although there were a number of exceptions.

By and large the school administrators believed that the "strong" teachers were doing well in desegregated situations and that those teachers experiencing some disciplinary problems had had difficulties prior to desegregation. The teachers often did not share this perception.

Several of the black teachers were concerned that some of the black students expected special treatment from them.

Most of the white teachers felt that the relationship between white and black teachers in desegregated schools is good. A substantial number spoke well of their black colleagues and several indicated they had "grown" through their contacts with the black teachers.

There was a wide variation of opinion among black teachers concerning black-white faculty relations. A number were very satisfied with their professional contacts and felt they had been well accepted by their white colleagues. Others were quite critical and felt that they were often ignored or merely tolerated. Some felt they were discriminated against by white principals or department heads. One noted faculty committee meetings held at private homes, from which he was excluded.

Few social contacts were reported among white and black faculty members.

In most of the schools visited the black teachers represented a small minority of the faculty. It was not unusual for a school to have only one to three black teachers although the student body might be 25 percent or more black. Most of the Negro students and teachers felt that "things would be better" if there were a larger number of black teachers in such schools to serve as counselors and authority figures. One Negro teacher, the only one at a desegregated high school, said that he had been approached "beyond my capacity" by Negro students wishing to seek his advice. The teacher in question was very popular with both white and black students.

Several of the administrators at desegregated schools felt that black teachers had been helpful in improving student morale and "avoiding trouble."

C. Extracurricular Activities

There was general agreement that extracurricular activities are open to all students at desegregated schools. There were few exceptions. At a few schools there were reports of organizations affiliated with "outside" clubs, service organizations and others, which did not welcome black students. In at least three cases the school affiliate groups were disbanded.

Although there was felt to be no effort, at the official level, to bar black students from activities, or to discourage their involvement, in most cases no efforts were reported to recruit or encourage the participation of the "new students." The most frequent approach by administrators, was to state that these activities are open to all, but that any special efforts to encourage any particular group would violate the concept of "equal treatment."

Varying patterns of participation by black students were reported by the black and white students and teachers. At some schools they were seen as actively involved in most activities; at others they were reported as definitely under-represented in proportion to their numbers.

In a small majority of the high schools visited, the black students were represented as participating strongly in athletics, but as participating less than white students in the nonathletic activities. Band and choral activities were sometimes exceptions. Few black students seem to have been involved in such activities as debating, or working on the school newspaper.

The white and black students often disagreed on the general question of extracurricular events, with the white students seeing no difference in the same schools where the black students saw themselves as under-represented.

Where the black students felt they were not participating at the same level as the whites, the black teachers and students gave various explanations: Lack of interest; a feeling that they were "not really welcome," and the strangeness of new

students facing established groups. Some stated that they were discouraged from such participation by their parents who wanted them to "learn, not push." One boy won a key role in a play, but gave it up because of parental opposition. A larger number of Negro than white students felt themselves unable to take part in after-school activities because they lived far from school or had to work after school.

In a few cases black students reported that they were discouraged from taking part in extracurricular activities by their own black peer-group which saw such involvement as "compromise" or "selling out." In one high school a Negro girl had won several honors and several student offices. She had white friends and often joined them in the cafeteria rather than sitting at the "black tables." In a school with a fairly small Negro minority this girl was rated as highly successful by the white teachers and students. She reported many slights and slurs from other black students.

Negro students often indicated their resentment at losing their leadership positions on transferring to the formerly-white school. In one district where white and black high schools were being consolidated at the white school, an effort was made to enable the black students to transfer their status to the new school. The cheerleaders at the black school became automatic members of the cheerleaders squad at the consolidated school. The boy who had been elected to serve as student body president at the black school became the vice-president of the student body at the new school. The black students and the faculty said this procedure had worked well.

In those few situations where black faculty members were serving as coaches or advisors the black students were seen as participating to a greater extent than otherwise. Such faculty members felt that they had been able to attract a number of the black students.

At most of the schools it was not felt that the involvement of black students had affected the participation of the whites. However, two athletic coaches reported cases of white boys quitting after being displaced on starting teams by black students.

D. Social Activities

In the areas of social contacts and informal personal relations there were more problems perceived than in the classroom or extracurricular activity. These problems were most evident in high schools.

Black students were reported as participating in official social activities, but to a substantially less degree in most schools than white students. In some schools the participation was seen as equally good, or bad, on the part of white and black students.

In most of the districts visited white and black students were seen as taking part in dances and other official social activities without incident. With the exception of one district, there were virtually no dancing or other social contacts reported between boys and girls of different races.

A few of the districts were reported to have curtailed their social schedules since desegregation. There were reports of banquets substituted for proms and of dances being curtailed. In two cases black students and parents stated that some formerly official activities were now conducted unofficially, our of school, and segregated. These were exceptions. In most cases social calendars were reported to be continued unchanged without any special rules concerning the participation of white and black students.

Negro students reported considerable insecurity concerning social activities at the desegregated schools. They indicated doubt as to their welcome. They commented on the different customs, patterns of behavior, music, and dance styles. In several cases black students reported that they did not come to the cances because of the differences. One high school boy said, "I like the white school for learning, the black school for socializing."

It is the informal, social relationships that were almost unanimously reported as the greatest problem area in the desegregated high schools. The relationship between the white and black students at the high school level was seen by the students, parents, and teachers involved as varying from uneventful toleration in some schools, often good-humored and polite, to tension and hostility in others. There have been at least some incidents that are seen as racial at most of the high schools visited.

Administrators generally expressed the view that most of the problems were caused by the same students of each race who were disciplinary problems prior to desegregation.

Informal contacts between white and black students were reported as differing greatly according to the age group. In the lower grades the teachers reported that the students generally accept each other with friendliness and without tension. Many friendships were noted. In some cases the situation in the elementary grades was seen as "completely natural," or "color blind."

Racial consciousness and tensions were reported as more marked in the middle and junior high schools and as strongest among the high school students. In most of the high schools visited, it was noted by black and white students that the races tended to be separate in the cafeterias, assembly halls, on the school grounds, even in classes where seating was optional.

As usual, there were considerable variations from district to district and school to school. At some high schools the informal relationships were described as friendly. The tensions and hostility between the races were most noted in the larger, and more urban, schools.

In most schools the teachers, and male students, black and white, indicated that there was more tension between the black and white girls than between the black and white boys.

The isolation of white and black students in the high schools was explained in many ways some blamed lack of leadership by school officials. Others said it was a voluntary choice by the students, a reflection of parental attitudes, or peer group pressures by both white and black groups. The students, particularly the girls, reported peer group pressures against what they frequently referred to as "fraternization."

There were many exceptions to these general reports. Boys participating together in athletics often reported forming friendships. Girls participating in sports reported friendships, but girls noted they generally have fewer opportunities to take part in sports.

At almost every high school visited, a number of the students interviewed stated that they did have friends of the other race, although they saw such friendships as the exception. Such friendships were described generally as limited to school experiences and activities.

E. Other

It should be remembered that in most cases, in the schools visited, the white students were attending the same schools they had attended before desegregation. The black students, however, often had been involuntarily transferred from all-black schools, with their associations, loyalties, and status connections disrupted. They were generally in the minority in the desegregated schools.

White high school students, on the whole, stated that they were secure and not particularly disturbed about the presence of black students. Even those white students who indicated attitudes of discrimination apparently felt that they were in their own school and in general control.

The Negro students indicated much less security. They expressed feelings of uncertainty stemming from "strongness." In many cases they expressed resentment over the loss of "our own" schools and said that they did not feel the same loyalty to and identity with the new schools.

In those high schools where the black students represented a large, rather than a small, minority, the Negroes expressed much less insecurity. There were more overt incidents of hostility, however, where the white and black student groups approached the same size than in schools with a larger white majority.

In only three of the schools there were traditional trappings of the Old Confederacy, using the Confederate flag, or Confederate band uniforms, or the team nickname "Rebels." In these cases where the trappings were continued after desegregation they were an expressed source of resentment on the part of the black students. In one case the emblems had since been changed, in two others they were not.

Administrators and teachers reported, however, that after two or three years new loyalties and identities did develop. Athletic competition was seen as a major aid to the development of new loyalties, particularly when black students were serving as cheerleaders and playing on the varsity teams.

At those few schools which were previously black but were majority white after desegregation, there was much less an out-group feeling on the part of the blacks. Three schools were

visited which were formerly black and now desegregated with a large minority of white students, or, in one case, a 50-50 ratio. In these three schools the whites were the "new students" and evidenced many of the same feelings of insecurity expressed elsewhere by the black students.

The OCR teams visited several new high schools and junior high schools, opened on a desegregated basis as part of the district's plan to eliminate the segregated school system. In these schools, too few for meaningful generalizations, there were fewer reports of incidents and tension between the black and white student groups.

This, then, was what we found to be the views of those directly involved in the desegregation situation.

IN - DEPTH STUDY

STATE	COUNTY	Total School Pop.	%White	%Negro	% Desegregation 67-68	68-69
Florida	Dade*	232,272	76.8	23.2	24.0	18.9
	Franklin	1,684	78.0	22.0	41.8	100.0
	Martin	5,108	72.1	27.9	58.8	69.3
Georgia	Carroll	7,319	78	22.0	32.0	100.0
	Rome	6,946	69.0	31.0	25.0	43.2
Mississippi	Hancock	1,358	85.3	12.7	100.0	100.0
	Harrison	6,798	73.0	27.0	3.0	16.9
	Jackson	3,947	93.0	7	25	79.8
South Carolina	Lexington #2	10,530	87	12	14.6	52
	York #4	2,194	80	20	17.9	54.3
Tennessee	Lake	2,172	69.7	30.3	36.9	48.9
	Lauderdale	4,283	57.1	42.9	9.9	23.8
	Williamson	6,234	84.4	15.6	60.0	100.0

* Dade County - About 18% of the nonwhite population was of Spanish descent

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20201

OCT 16 1969

FOR RELEASE
SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 1969

Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Robert H. Finch released an attitude survey which indicates that experience with school desegregation generally improves the feelings of students, teachers and parents toward desegregation.

"The one statement most often repeated was, 'It's going much better than I expected.' This opinion was expressed by black and white, by students, teachers, administrators and parents," stated the report of the survey, submitted by the Atlanta regional office of H.E.W.'s Office for Civil Rights.

The survey, conducted in the spring of 1969, was the result of interviews with 1,230 persons involved in school desegregation in 13 school districts which had experienced some desegregation for two years. The districts were located in Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee. It was stressed in the report that the survey was purely a survey of attitudes, rather than of numbers or other provable facts, and that it was undertaken to help civil rights staff better understand the desegregation process.

(More)

Some of the consensus views of students, teachers, school administrators and parents, all of whom were promised anonymity to encourage frank response:

--The desegregation process goes more smoothly as time goes on.

--Desegregation works better when students and teachers involved have had prior experience in desegregated situations.

--Black students in desegregated schools are felt to be getting a better education than in segregated schools, while educational progress of white students has not been affected one way or the other.

--Faculty desegregation is viewed as successful.

Not all of the majority responses were positive, of course. Some of the more negative results of the survey:

--Hostility expressed, mostly in the high school grades, between white and black students. Such feelings were reported to have been stronger in the first year of desegregation, and at the beginning of school years, than they were later.

--Existence of uncertainty or "strangeness" on the part of black students, again primarily high school students, placed in desegregated situations for the first time.

--White parents are more critical than any other of the groups interviewed, of the desegregated learning experience.

(More)

The report was released at the opening of a school year which will see more desegregation at once than at any moment since the Supreme Court outlawed dual school systems in 1954, Leon E. Panetta, director of the Office for Civil Rights said. He said that 238 school districts are due to implement voluntary desegregation plans which will eliminate the dual school system this fall, compared with 55 school district plans last year. Panetta said an additional 109 districts' desegregation plans which call for complete desegregation in 1970, also include substantial desegregation steps this year.

"I think a survey like the one just submitted by our Atlanta office can help to convince many people who will experience desegregation for the first time that it is a valuable as well as legal aspect of education, and that it is a better experience with the passage of time," Panetta said.

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